

T. A.

GLEANING AMONG THE SHEAVES.

"GLEANING AMONG THE SHEAVES."

SERMON

IN MEMORY OF

MRS. SOPHRONIA NORRIS TUCK.

PREACHED IN THE

South Congregational Church, New Britain,

AT THE

Sunday Morning Service, May 26, 1889.

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. JAMES W. COOPER, D. D.

ORDER OF SERVICE.

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1. Organ Prelude.

2. Opening Verse, by the Choir and Congregation.

Nearer, my God, to Thee!
Nearer to Thee !
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me !
Still all my song shall be
Nearer, my God, to Thee !
Nearer to Thee !

3. Invocation and Lord's Prayer.

4. Anthem by the Choir.

Hallelujah ! Hallelujah !

“What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?”

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple,” etc.—*Rev. 7: 13-17.*

5. Scripture Lesson.

St. Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, verses 13 to 48.

6. Pastoral Prayer.

7. Hymn, by Choir and Congregation.

“Who are these in bright array,
This innumerable throng,
Round the altar night and day,
Hymning one triumphant song ?—
‘Worthy is the Lamb, once slain,
Blessing, honor, glory, power,
Wisdom, riches, to obtain
New dominion every hour,’

“These through fiery trials trod ;
 These from great affliction came :
 Now before the throne of God,
 Sealed with His almighty name;
 Clad in raiment pure and white,
 Victor-palms in every hand,
 Through their dear Redeemer’s might,
 More than conquerors they stand.

“Hunger, thirst, disease unknown,
 On immortal fruits they feed ;
 Them the Lamb, amid the throne,
 Shall to living fountains lead ;
 Joy and gladness banish sighs :
 Perfect love dispel all fears ;
 And forever from all eyes
 God shall wipe away the tears.”

8. Weekly Offering.
9. Sermon.
10. Prayer.
11. Hymn, by Choir and Congregation.

“Father, hear the prayer we offer !
 Not for ease that prayer shall be,
 But for strength that we may ever
 Live our lives courageously.

“Not forever by still waters
 Would we idly quiet stay :
 But would smite the living fountains
 From the rocks along our way.

“Be our strength in hours of weakness,
 In our wand’rings be our guide ;
 Through endeavor, failure, danger,
 Father, be Thou at our side.”

12. Benediction.

SERMON.

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RUTH 2: 7. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.

THE scene is that of a harvest-field with busy workmen toiling under a burning sun. The heavy grain falls in golden mass at every sickle stroke. Strong arms gather the shining winrows into fruitful sheaves, and the rich burdens are borne by the reapers to the threshing floor.

Jehovah's care for the poor of His people demanded of the husbandman that there should be no greedy gathering of the grain, but that out of the richness of his blessing he should leave some portion of the harvest for those who might be dependent upon his generosity. No good man's field was therefore fully furnished, no harvest scene complete, until the humble gleaner had joined the party and with patient industry was gathering, stalk by stalk, her little store.

It was in this way that, at the time of barley harvest, Ruth visited Boaz' field in Bethlehem. She was a woman; she could not do man's work. But she had her duties, nevertheless, to those she

loved. And she had her privileges, also, as a Jewish woman,—for by her own choice she had forsaken Moab, and, following Naomi, had made Israel her country and Israel's God her God. And so, though high-born and unaccustomed to menial service, finding her hands empty and seeing work to do, she came to the gleaning.

In her new vocation, undertaken as a labor of love, we hardly know which to admire the more, her womanly modesty or her enterprising ambition. She carefully keeps within her sphere, but she is not satisfied there with any ordinary effort or ordinary success. She knows her calling to be a humble one, but she aspires in it to the best that it can afford. And the servant that is set over the reapers is startled by her bold request, which he has not the heart to deny,—“Let me, I pray you, glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.” It was a special privilege. But Boaz himself confirmed her in it, and, when the day was ended and her work was done, the rich treasure she bore to her home was the reward of her loving earnestness and true womanly aspiration.

This beautiful pastoral from the old Israelitish annals yields itself naturally in spiritual suggestion. The simple story may readily become a parable, illustrating our present moral conditions. The great world is to-day more than ever regarded, according to the scriptural conception of it, as a field open to spiritual cultivation. The broad plains are already white to the harvest. The church

is God's working Israel. Every disciple of Christ is sent as a servant into this garden of the Lord to gather fruit for His garner. The time of reaping is come, and the call is loud and long from the Lord of the harvest that more laborers shall go forth into His harvest. There is need of devotion and charity and sacrifice,—such as will lead us all, like Ruth at Bethlehem, to stoop to humble duties lovingly, and, like her, to do our work efficiently.

We feel this the more deeply when, in the face of multiplying duties, the ranks of the faithful workers are being constantly broken. The truth is pressed home upon us and the exhortation from it becomes the more important, when, with a larger work to do and a wider opportunity to fill, our numbers are depleted and the willing and efficient are called away from our side to the rest that follows after toil.

It is in such a condition as this that we now find ourselves as a church of Christ. It has pleased the Master to bless this church by laying upon it heavy responsibilities. In the providence of God we have been led during the past years to undertake a greater work than usually falls to the lot of a single local body. We have been set in the midst of a growing community, with its peculiar needs. Our people have had a mind to work, and the work has increased upon our hearts and hands. But from the growing work many have been taken away. Few churches have suffered as this church has suffered in the death of substantial and devoted

men and women, whose service of the church was its strength and hope. This has been a sad fact in our history during all the years of the present pastorate. We had trusted that God in His mercy would spare us further trial at the present time; but I return from a brief absence to find that within these few weeks five of our number have folded their hands for the eternal rest, and that since the present year began seven have gone from us to the church on high.

The lesson is a most solemn one. The work is ours, and it must go forward, even though the faithful are removed. The privilege and the responsibility are with us who remain.

These several deaths have been entirely among the women of the church. Some of these have in recent years been laid aside from active duties and have been able to give us only their prayers and sympathies. All were faithful in their place, and I regret that it was not permitted me to bear a pastor's testimony to their fidelity when the last rites were performed. But one of the number was so suddenly stricken down, in the full maturity of her powers and in the midst of such varied and useful service, that I cannot forbear to mention her name and her good works in this more public manner.

I do this, not to make her case conspicuous, nor to speak words of eulogy. I know that such reference would be as repugnant to her feelings as it would be inappropriate, but I do it because in the death of Mrs. Tuck a most serious emphasis has

been given to the exhortation already suggested, and in her life also there is an inspiring lesson.

The prayer of Ruth on entering the harvest field, "I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves," indicates most truthfully the spirit with which our sister and friend put forth her efforts in the wider fields of life. I seem to discover in her the same qualities of womanly dignity and serious earnestness, of modest devotion and wise efficiency, that were exhibited by the fair gleaner of Bethlehem. And when evening came and her work was done and she laid the treasure of her life at her Master's feet, it was a goodly sheaf of well-ripened grain which she had to bring.

From the time when grateful women, having received spiritual blessing of the Lord, followed Jesus in the way and "ministered to Him of their substance," *woman's work* has held an important and exalted place in the church of Christ. Sometimes by formal appointment and public consecration, more frequently in private ways and in the line of ordinary opportunity, the church has always availed itself of woman's tact and devotion and ready sympathy. Notwithstanding the fact that the regular "ministry," in the offices of the pastorate and the diaconate, has been held by men, it is emphatically true that in personal service, in acts of personal devotion and self-denying kindness, Christian *women* have been especially distinguished, and to them the church, from the earliest time, has been indebted for the revelation of

that Christian love in active exercise, which is the essence of our religion. They are honorably mentioned, by name, in St. Paul's epistles, as "having been succourers of many," and "laboring much in the Lord." In the early church, as the writings of the Fathers clearly show, it was expected of them, as a matter of course, that they should go around to the houses of the poor, relieve the needy, attend the sick, and visit the imprisoned martyrs. They established hospitals and orphanages and strangers' homes; institutions till then unknown in the world. "These works of charity and mercy were performed by them without forming themselves into sisterhoods or taking vows, or wearing an unusual dress, or calling themselves by fantastic names, or in any way relinquishing their ordinary, simple, natural and therefore most Christian position in the family circle and the household life."

These primitive customs are not yet forgotten. We rejoice rather to believe that they have been recently maintained among us with increasing faithfulness and devotion. The women of the church are to-day carrying the burden of the church's ministry. In missionary enterprise, in Sunday school instruction, in household visitation, in personal charity, in devotional service, they are furnishing to the church the most necessary support, and are our worthiest exponents of a vital Christian faith. With characteristic womanly modesty they are content to be but gleaners in the rich harvest fields,

but they press closely upon the reapers and glean
“among the sheaves.”

As illustrating the service rendered by one of these Christian women, I would refer again and more particularly to our dear friend who has now passed away.

She loved her home; it was her most sacred care, the place of her dearest joy. She had wide sympathies; her interests in life were many and varied; she by no means confined herself to what is technically regarded religious work. And yet, within the church of which she was a member, she found time and strength and inclination to serve in almost numberless ways and with exceptional efficiency and fidelity.

Ever since we knew her she was a teacher in our Sunday school and a mother to her “girls,” as she always loved to call them. She had also the interests of the whole school at heart, caring for its library and serving frequently upon its various committees. She had a very special sympathy for young women who were maintaining themselves by their own exertions. Some of the best efforts of her life were given to the “Class Union,” in which these young women had been gathered by herself for social, spiritual and intellectual improvement,—an organization which she loved better, perhaps, than any other within this church. She was for several years the directress of our “Maternal Association;” from its beginning the secretary and treasurer of the “Ladies’ Foreign Missionary Society;” always an active

helper in the "Ladies' Benevolent Society," and its work for Home Missions; and a valued member of that "Board of Ladies for Home Work," which ought rather to be known among us as our Board of Deaconesses. Few of our women made more calls than she upon the poor, the sick, the lonely. Few were more attentive in times of sorrow and affliction. Few were better counsellors in times of perplexity. She loved the church for the blessings it brought to her, and for the opportunities it afforded her. Its ministries were dear to her. Its prosperity was her prayer. Its services were her delight.

Such a memory is precious indeed; and such a service is both an honor and an inspiration to her sex.

There is a passage in a paper which Mrs. Tuck presented some time since at the Ladies' Literary club of this city, where her name will be long remembered with affection and respect, which greatly impressed me as I was looking over some of her written words during the past week. I quote it because of the appeal there is in it, and the high, true ideal of Christian womanhood which it sets forth. I wish it might furnish an inspiration to some young life to-day! "Let me leave with you," she says, "this beautiful thought; I wish it were wholly my own. The world has long seen, in every gallery of art, the Infant Christ in the arms of a woman; but the world has not always seen that through womanhood it is to receive some essential revelation of Christianity. It has under-

stood only the surface meaning of Madonnas, and has tired even of that. But, at last, what art has been dimly foretelling is now beginning to be actual. Whether in cap or kerchief of Sister Dora or Sister Agnes, or with the red-cross badge of Clara Barton, or wearing the unmarked dress of those who feed the hungry and teach the ignorant of Christ and His love, new Madonnas are revealing something more beautiful than beauty, and holier than any image in sacred shrine. * * We need no longer hear the cry, 'Wanted, a vocation!' Our women need not go into political fields, they need not aspire to literary fame. The world needs women,—refined, cultured women, of Christian courage and humble faith, who will take a lowly task at Christ's bidding and never fear. There is abundant work in common life for all restless, noble souls, which will test their highest energies, give scope to their best executive abilities, and call for their holiest sympathies."

I would be glad this morning if this or some other word might give a new and noble impulse to some young girl's life. I wish especially that I might hold this Christian ideal of womanhood before those young women in whose welfare our departed friend took so deep an interest and for whom she exerted herself so untiringly. There are those in all our churches who allow themselves no high aspirations in Christian service, because they think that real efficiency in this direction is beyond the possibility of their attainment. Successful

Christian work seems to them to presuppose some special aptitude, some peculiar endowment of nature, some particular advantage of birth, or position, or education. It is doubtless true that there are natural advantages which may be made tributary to one's increased usefulness in life. But it is also true, that efficiency in Christian service is by no means dependent on such mere circumstances as these.

The first great need, in order to devoted usefulness in the world, is a *purpose* in that direction. Where this purpose is wanting, no possible endowment of heart, or mind, or rank, or wealth, can achieve anything noble or worthy of the name of womanhood. But with this, accompanied by consecration, patience, humility, teachableness, fidelity, qualities which are all easily within the reach of every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no intelligent woman in the church who might not be a fountain of blessing to all about her, and while she enriched other lives, her own also would be to herself a constant well-spring of joy.

I have already said that Mrs. Tuck had a special sympathy for those who, in early life, were compelled to care for themselves. It will be interesting and helpful for such to know that this sympathy of hers was not altogether without an experience upon which to base it. Mrs. Tuck was not born in the midst of great wealth or with high social prestige; she was a country girl, from a little town in Maine, and did not have such advantages, either

educational or social, as fall to the lot of young women of her class among us here and now. Her father died in her childhood, her school life was necessarily irregular, and she was early thrown upon her own exertions. She began to teach before she had completed her own education, and she was not above the honorable engagements of a useful employment. Her care for herself seemed to develop in her a care for others also. She began this, I am told, very early, even when a child ; watching with the sick, teaching the little ones, sympathizing with the poor, and, after her conversion, seeking at once to lead others to the Saviour she herself had found.

There are those among us who will remember when she came first to New Britain, now thirty-five years ago, the young bride of the principal of our High school ; and how, even in her youthful inexperience, one of her earliest self-imposed duties was to visit the school and gather the girls into a little meeting for Christian devotion. And from that time to this, among us here, and then in Boston, and now for more than twenty years again among us, she has worked cheerfully on, using the talent that was given her, doing what she could, gleaning among the sheaves ; her own character ripening the while and her ministries of love multiplying continually.

Her former Boston pastor, now a venerated father in our Congregational ministry,* writes of her in

*Rev. A. C. Thompson, D. D.

a recent letter:—"I have seldom seen a more blameless, collected, consistent life; more of poised energy under the control of modesty and firm good sense are rarely combined."

All who knew our friend will recognize the justice and discrimination in this estimate of her power. "Poised energy, under the control of modesty and firm good sense," exactly describes that peculiar combination of qualities which gave her such marked success in her service of Christ. Her energy was tireless, she was patient and persistent in every undertaking, she had courage and strength and zeal; but this energy was well-poised, modesty and good sense held always a firm control. Her love and devotion were no mere enthusiastic sentiments, easily excited and as easily quenched; they were, rather, a deep and powerful principle in her life, and gave a steady light. The flame was maintained by secret converse with her Lord, and the light was manifested when and where her Lord ordained.

This simple analysis of a life of Christian usefulness has its teachings for us all; it will be especially suggestive to those who in these past years have been brought under the influence of her strong and loving character.

I have spoken this morning to women; for both the lesson and the illustration are for them. It is impossible for me to give due emphasis to the exhortation. It is difficult for you, my sisters, to feel sufficiently the moral responsibility that rests upon you, growing out of the unquestionable

fact of woman's moral superiority over man. This fact is, I believe, capable of demonstration. But it is not a matter for woman's pride. It is an appeal, rather, to her sense of grateful obligation. "It took a fallen angel's fullest strength to lead a pure woman to ruin; a fallen woman's simple invitation was sufficient for man's overthrow. Adam was an easy victim when the support of Eve's moral force was taken away from him. As the moral superior she was therefore chiefly responsible for the transgression and must accept the larger consequences of her larger responsibility. And so, now, as before the fall, woman is morally superior to man. She seems by nature to be more like God than is man. She turns more readily than man to God; and she wins man to, and inspires man in, the loving service of God."

"Not she with trait'rous kiss her Master stung;
Not she denied Him with unfaithful tongue;
She, when apostles fled, could danger brave,
Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave."

With this crown of honor from the hand of Christ, what glory is there in true womanhood! what power! what possibility for good! what obligation to self-denying service and devoted life! what rich reward when all is done!

"Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou?"— was the welcome greeting that fell upon the ears of the eager Ruth as she hastened homeward from her toil in the field of Bethlehem. Her hands were full and her heart was

glad; and to her the home-coming was an act of joy.

So may it be with each one of us, dear friends! Whether we reap or glean, whether our sphere of influence be wide or narrow, whether we are to serve through many years or our future days of toil be few, may we be ever modest, faithful, efficient, zealous; and returning home with joy at last may we lay at our Master's feet a goodly sheaf!

SOPHRONIA NORRIS, wife of J. Warren Tuck, was born in Livermore, Maine, May 17th, 1828. Her girlhood was passed in Mount Vernon, Maine, and for several years she taught in the public schools of Hallowell and neighboring towns.

In 1850 she went to Boston, and the old homestead having been destroyed by a fire which swept through the little village, she never afterwards resided in her native state.

She was married May 27th, 1851, to Mr. Tuck. In 1853 they removed to New Britain, Conn., where he became principal of the High School, which position he retained until 1857, when they went to Boston, returning to New Britain in 1867, which has since been their home. Mrs. Tuck died in the early morning of May 2, 1889. The interment took place at Fairview Cemetery, New Britain, on the afternoon of May 4.

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